

Thank you for allowing me to speak today. My name is Maria Valenti and I am currently a resident of Lansing, Michigan and a doctoral student at Michigan State University in the Psychology department. I am speaking today regarding House Bill 4131.

All children deserve the right to be cared for by healthy and devoted parents. House Bill 4131 is above else a child welfare bill. Research has consistently shown that children flourish psychologically, academically, and socially when raised in a loving and healthy two parent home. Granting this opportunity should never be denied regardless of the parents' sexual orientation. I would also like to remind you that being gay or lesbian is not a mental illness. Many gay and lesbian people are parents. 33% of lesbian couples and 22% of gay couples have a child under the age of 18 in their home. There is no scientific evidence for concluding that lesbian mothers or gay fathers are unfit parents. Lesbian and heterosexual women have not been found to differ markedly in child rearing practices. Research suggests that lesbian and gay parents are just as likely as heterosexual parents to provide supportive and healthy environments for their children. Some studies even suggest that lesbian mothers' and gay fathers' parenting skills may be superior to those of matched heterosexual parents. In regards to a child's development, gender identity, gender role behavior, and sexual orientation develop in much the same ways among lesbian mothers as they do with heterosexual parents. This is the same in other aspects of development such as personality, self-concept, and conduct. Research also demonstrates that children of gay and lesbian parents have normal social relationships with peers and adults. Overall, research suggests that the development, adjustment, and well-being of children with lesbian and gay parents do not differ markedly from children with heterosexual parents.

On a personal note, I am woman who has been in a committed relationship with another woman for almost 9 years. We are currently foster parents to two children born to heterosexual parents. We took them in knowing of their past trauma and hurt. We work to help heal them, give them love, bandage their emotional wounds and struggle with them as they grow into healthier children. But yet, my partner and I cannot officially adopt them together. I ask why? Our house is safe, loving and nurturing. The two children we have now have come along way since they were dropped off at our house with only two small garbage bags full of belongings. We give them our heart, our home, clothes, food, shelter – everything that a parent could possibly give their children.

In addition, my partner is going to give birth to twins in August regardless of our right to both be legal parents to them. She will be the only legal parent. What if something happens to her? I will have more legal rights to our foster kids than the children my partner and I dreamed of together, planned together, and hopefully raise together. It gives me unnecessary stress to think that my kids can be taken from me. My children will not have access to my health insurance, inheritance rights, and legal security of a parent if my partner dies. What about what is best for the children?

If lawmakers wish to discriminate against me or punish me for being gay, punish me and not my children.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak today.